

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: Portable Fire Extinguishers – Just Remember “PASS”

The steps to using a portable fire extinguisher seem simple to remember; at least until you are faced with a real fire! Many people in this situation have reported that their mind “goes blank”, and as a result they were unable to get their portable extinguisher to function properly, or they failed to extinguish the fire.

We have previously reviewed proper selection of fire extinguishers, and we have also discussed how they work to extinguish a fire. So today we are going to review the four steps to follow when using a portable extinguisher, and they are as easy as remembering the word “PASS”.

(We recommend you make a copy of the handout that comes with this toolbox talk for each trainee and pass them out now for their reference).

Each letter in “PASS” stands for one of the four sequential steps to properly use the extinguisher:

- **“P” stands for “PULL” the pin.** The pin in the handle keeps you from accidentally discharging the extinguisher during normal handling and must be removed for it to function. There’s usually a thin plastic tamper seal holding this pin in place, and it easily breaks when you pull out the pin.
- **“A” stands for “AIM” at the base of the fire.** This step is crucial because you must direct the extinguishing media towards the material that is actually burning so it can extinguish the flame.
- **“S” stands for “SQUEEZE” the handle of the portable extinguisher from a safe distance.** This causes the extinguishing media to discharge from the extinguisher. An extra word of caution; if you are using a CO₂ extinguisher, avoid touching the horn-shaped discharge nozzle, as it can cause frostbite.
- **“S” stands for “SWEEP” from side to side across the base of the fire as you approach,** to make sure the extinguishing media completely covers the burning material and puts out the fire. Then, keep an eye on the area for a while in case a hot spot flares up and the fire starts to burn again.

These four steps for using a portable extinguisher are simple but can easily be forgotten when faced with an unexpected fire. So, in review; here are the four steps to take when using an extinguisher to put out a small fire. And they can be as simple as remembering PASS – which stands for Pull, Aim, Squeeze, and Sweep. But also remember that you should never, ever, attempt to put out a fire with an extinguisher if you are unsure about your ability to do so safely and effectively!

